
Session B1

Room: Brookfield, Thursday 9.30-12.15

Parliamentary Technology Assessment: Genetic tests during pregnancy

Chairs: Dr. Sergio Bellucci (TA-SWISS) and Dr. Michael Nentwich (ITA-OEAW)

- MP Thomas De Courten, National Council, Swiss People's Party
- MP Min Li Marti, National Council, Social Democratic Party of Switzerland
- Dr. Dorothea Wunder, Centre for Medically Assisted Procreation (CPMA), Lausanne, Switzerland; member of the Swiss National Advisory Commission on Biomedical Ethics (NCE)
- Dr. Erich Griessler, Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna
- The clinical and political domain of prenatal diagnosis in Austria. Old debates, new roles, anxieties, pressures and stress
- Dr. Jean-Daniel Strub, Brauer & Strub, Zurich
- Main results of the TA-SWISS study "Genetic tests during pregnancy"

The new non-invasive prenatal tests (NIPT) can be done early during pregnancy and only involve blood being taken from the pregnant woman. From this are extracted fragments of the embryonic genetic material, which is then tested for possible genetic defects. The new technology of early and easy testing gives new momentum to the general debate on prenatal diagnosis (PND). A key question concerns the need for appropriate, comprehensive consultation that goes beyond the purely medical, which allows the pregnant woman freedom of choice and places no pressure of any kind on her. The TA-SWISS study "Genetic tests during pregnancy" is an example for the parliamentary technology assessment approach, because TA-SWISS has been invited in three political commissions for presentation of the results. A revised version of the Swiss Federal Act on Human Genetic Testing (HGTA) should be ready for deliberation in parliament in the course of this year.

In Austrian maternity care, prenatal diagnosis is routinely practiced, but still – like in many countries – a sensitive and controversial political issue. There are several reasons for this apparent paradox: PND strives to contribute to the birth of healthy children but it also relates to negative and positive eugenics and a society's attitudes towards physically or mentally challenged people; PND can lead to the decision for abortion, which in is a highly controversial practice in many societies. The presentation will address how PND is governed and practiced in Austrian maternal care. Based on qualitative interviews with actors in the clinical and political domain the paper outlines how PND transforms pregnancy and the relationship between the physician and the pregnant women. For both PND provides new chances and certainties but also generates new anxiety and stress as well as mutually enforcing pressures.